

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

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**The Impact of Physical Fitness on Perceived Job Satisfaction
for Law Enforcement Officers**

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ABSTRACT

Physical fitness and job satisfaction are two areas of interest that are receiving increasing attention within the law enforcement community. This paper examines the relationship between physical fitness and job satisfaction to determine whether a correlation exists. It was anticipated that a positive relationship existed. This question was explored by researching the existing body of knowledge contained in articles, journals, and academic studies. A general but by no means a comprehensive correlation was found in this body of knowledge but the results were mixed. To further examine the relationship between physical fitness and job satisfaction, a one-page survey was developed and distributed to the 106 sworn personnel of the Sugar Land Police Department. The results of this survey showed mixed results leaning towards the lack of an affirmative link between physical fitness and job satisfaction. The inconclusive findings in the existing body of knowledge and in the survey illustrate the need for additional study in this area.

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INTRODUCTION

Physical fitness can be many things to many people. During the past few decades, an increasing number of people have made the commitment to lifetime physical fitness by participating in regular exercise. This interest has taken on many forms, including individual and group participation. Many have stayed with more traditional exercises such as running, swimming, bicycling, weight lifting, aerobics, or team sports. However, new techniques such as kick boxing, yoga, and martial arts have seen an increase in participation in an exercise setting. The physical and medical benefits of regular exercise are well documented and those familiar with the field recommend a combination of strength training and aerobic exercise a minimum of three times a week to maximize benefits.

The increased visibility of exercise clubs and facilities pays testament to the growth of the industry. More and more corporations have recognized the benefits of exercise and are encouraging employees to participate through a variety of incentives. They recognize that healthier employees benefit both the individual and the corporation.

Many law enforcement officers maintain a good level of physical fitness and believe that this fitness helps them in their job duties. In fact, most police academies across the country include a regimen of exercise in their program. Most police agencies require some type of physical test as part of the application process. There are agencies that require their officers to pass regular fitness tests. However, there are many law enforcement officers who do not exercise and are sadly out of shape.

The purpose of this project is to conduct research into the relationship between physical fitness and job satisfaction. Specifically to answer the question, is there a

positive correlation between physical fitness and perceived job satisfaction for law enforcement officers? The existing body of knowledge includes books, journals, and studies on the direct impact of physical fitness on job satisfaction, and indirectly through decreased stress and an improved sense of well-being. This body of knowledge will be examined as a foundation for this project. In addition, a survey will be developed and distributed to the 106 law enforcement officers employed by the City of Sugar Land, Texas. This survey, although not scientific, is intended to measure the impact of participating in a physical fitness program on the perceived level of job satisfaction for these officers.

It is anticipated the results of this survey will demonstrate that a positive correlation exists between participating in a regular fitness program and perceived job satisfaction. The benefits of this research will be to highlight this correlation for the law enforcement community and perhaps encourage improved fitness. In addition, this research should demonstrate the need for further study of this area.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

People choose the profession of law enforcement for various reasons. However, it has been this researcher's experience that many officers are in the career field because they want to. It might have been a life long goal or a career path that developed inadvertently as a result of life's circumstances. One thing that is consistent is that no matter why a person initially became an officer, they stay because they want to.

With this being said, the issue of job satisfaction among officers might appear inconsequential. However, according to Stevens (1999) law enforcement officers scored

low on job satisfaction scales. The reasons came from both within the organization and from outside the organization. One common thread that seemed to be inter-related to the job satisfaction issue throughout the body of knowledge looked at for this paper was the issue of stress. Through the study by Stevens (1999), it became clear that not only critical incidents produce stress but general work experiences produce stress as well. This demonstrates that not only the unique aspects of law enforcement produce occupational stress, but general aspects that can be found throughout various career fields including law enforcement produce stress as well. For example: excessive paperwork, poor fringe benefits, poor supervisor support, and lack of recognition. These general stressors, along with the critical incident stressors associated with law enforcement, may help explain the common belief about police officers and stress.

Law enforcement is all about people. Patrol is considered the backbone of any agency and is supported by various support services such as criminal investigations, crime prevention, traffic enforcement, identification, and other specialized units. Very few of these are jobs where the officer spends his time alone in a quiet office. Intense face to face interaction with other people is built into the nature of the job. Looking more closely at this lends insight into the job satisfaction issue.

Based on the findings of Swent and Gmelch; Gmelch, Lovrich, and Wilke; and Blix and Lee (As cited in Siggia 1996) professionals in job fields that require substantial interaction with other people are at the greatest risk for developing occupational stress. Happ and Yoder found (as cited in Siggia 1996) occupational stress can lower the level of job satisfaction. Kirschner's study involving 387 federal employees (as cited in Siggia 1996) found that a decrease in stress correlated with an increase in job satisfaction. This

relationship among interaction with people, occupational stress, and job satisfaction is definitely applicable to law enforcement. Law enforcement officers frequently interact with other people on a continual basis throughout their careers. In fact, there is very little that an officer does that does not require substantial interaction with others. This interaction is usually on a personal level and at times can be very intense up to, an including life threatening situations.

Anything that influences occupational stress is relevant and deserves close scrutiny and further study. Law enforcement managers should particularly pay close attention to this connection if they are to maintain an effective force. Individual officers need to also be aware of these issues as they have a personal stake in how occupational stress impacts their job performance and manifests itself in their personal lives.

A natural question to this established relationship between interaction, stress, and job satisfaction would be; what can be influenced or changed to benefit individual officers and the law enforcement community as a whole? Obviously, interaction with other people is something that is naturally built into the nature of law enforcement. Although technology may have a limited impact on interaction, one on one contact will remain a necessity for effective law enforcement. The remaining factor, stress, needs to be considered as an area where a positive impact can be made therefore influencing job satisfaction. According to Horowitz (1985) developing effective coping skills to reduce the negative impacts of daily work stress can result in happier and more productive employees.

An entire industry has developed around stress reduction. Seminars can be attended, stress-reducing sessions can be enrolled in, books can be ordered, and counselors can be

consulted. However, as with most things, unless habits and lifestyle are changed, results can be short lived. One such change that should be considered is physical fitness. According to Johnson (1995) exercise is probably the most common method officers can use to reduce and control stress. A department with physically fit officers benefits from reduced stress related problems. In addition, fitness studies show that physically fit officers perform their duties on a higher level than out of shape officers. Sweeny (1992).

There is documented research that clearly illustrates the benefits of physical fitness on job satisfaction. Holland's study (as cited in Siggia 1996) determined that employees who participated in physical activities had lower levels of tension, depression, fatigue, anger, and mood disturbance. In fact, the more time spent exercising, the more these stress factors decreased. An excellent argument can be made that decreasing tension, depression, fatigue, anger, and mood disturbance among law enforcement officers is not only desirable, but also a priority. Physical fitness may also have positive psychological effects on an individual. While engaged in a physical fitness program, as a person's psychological state improves, so will his or her attitude toward the job. As a result, workers will experience higher job satisfaction. (Sonstroem and Walker; Horowicz; Rudmman and Steinhardt; Connell and Sharp; Holland; Watts et al., as cited in Siggia 1996). A study by Harris and Roberts (as cited in Siggia 1996) found that at a Safeway wholesale bakery plant, tardiness and absenteeism decreased by more than 60% and union grievances by 95% after implementing a wellness program.

According to Siggia 1996, a study of 105 participants was conducted to measure the relationship between university members' job satisfaction/stress and their perceived level of physical fitness. The specific goal of this study was to determine if participating in

physical fitness was related to reducing stress at work. Physical fitness was based on the subject's perceived level of good physical condition. Participation in physical fitness was defined as engaging in a physical activity for thirty minutes at least three times per week. Work satisfaction was defined as being content at work. The results of this study were intriguing. A vast majority of the respondents (84%) perceived themselves in better physical shape than others their age. 90% believed their job gave them a sense of accomplishment and 94% considered their job interesting. The positive correlation documented led the researchers to conclude that a significant relationship existed between the respondent's perceived level of physical fitness and their job satisfaction.

Norvell, Belles, and Hills (1988) documented more evidence of the harmful effects of stress in a study. They learned through a study of 139 supervisory personnel in a law enforcement agency that a strong negative relationship existed between most aspects of job satisfaction and reported physical symptoms. In other words, greater job satisfaction was associated with fewer negative physical symptoms. However, the researchers cautioned their sample did not indicate high levels of stress or physical symptoms and their conclusions were hypothesized indicating a need for further study.

Wellness programs that contain elements of exercise have also shown to be effective in combating the harmful effects of work related stress. Horowitz (1985) learned that participants in his study who were in a wellness program tolerate work stress better and perceive their jobs as less stressful. He found an increase in a sense of well being and a decrease in anxiety among those participants in the wellness program as compared to others. According to the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports (1988), a NASA employee study found a fitness program had many dividends. Among those were

an improved sense of well being, higher overall work output, fewer accidents, fewer sick days and emotional disorders, less employee turnover, improved morale, and more positive work attitudes. This brings up an interesting point about perceptions. Horowitz (1985) determined that a person's perceptions about physical fitness training effects have a positive impact on self-esteem. This enhanced self-esteem was found to buffer the effects of work related stress. A more recent study seems to validate these findings. Daley and Parfitt (1996) found in their study of 293 British office employees that members of an exercise club showed greater levels of job satisfaction and physical well being. This study also used participant's perceived job satisfaction by asking participants to report their job satisfaction on a sliding scale. Again, a positive correlation was shown between physical fitness and job satisfaction.

Whittaker (1987) studied the relationship between a worksite aerobic exercise program and job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and cardiovascular fitness. Whittaker (1987) found improvements in perceived fitness among participants. Interestingly he found that improvements in perceived fitness and actual fitness were unrelated. Participants who benefited most physically did not make the greatest gains in job and life satisfaction. However, the change in perceived fitness was predictive of the change in job and life satisfaction.

Morgan and Pollock (1978 as cited by Whittaker) found that subjects reported an increased sense of well being and reduced tension and depression. However, the use of objective measurements failed to show analogous changes. Self reported psychological benefits have emerged where accompanying increases in job satisfaction have not. (Cox,

Shephard & Corey, 1981; Gillespie, Schork, Klein & Zyzanski, 1982 as cited by Whittaker).

According to Driver and Ratliff (1982) management perceives three general benefits from encouraging physical fitness: improved wellness, more cohesive work groups within the organization, and improved employee satisfaction. The existing literature involving physical fitness and job satisfaction seems to point in the direction of a positive correlation but not in a completely predictable fashion. Several variables were introduced as possibly having an influence. In addition, several peripheral benefits and relationships seem to exist as well.

METHODOLOGY

Is there a positive correlation between participating in a regular physical fitness program and perceived job satisfaction for law enforcement officers? It is hypothesized that is likely that such a correlation exists. To test this hypothesis and provide an answer to the research question proposed, a survey was developed and distributed to the 106 law enforcement officers employed by the City of Sugar Land. The survey was distributed to all officers within the department and included patrol officers, bailiffs, detectives, identification officers, traffic officers, crime prevention officers, kids and cops officers, the training officer, and the dispatch supervisor. In addition, all sergeants, lieutenants, captains, and the assistant chief (acting chief) were given a survey as well.

The survey (see appendix) consisted of one page and was placed in each officer's individual mailbox at the police department. Attached to the survey was a cover letter from this researcher outlining the purpose of the survey as fulfilling a requirement for

graduation from the Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas. The specific research question proposed was not directly divulged to the participants. In addition, each participant was assured that, although the findings would be presented in a research paper, individual responses were anonymous. Participants were instructed to complete the survey and return to my mailbox or through interdepartmental mail. The survey asked the respondents seven questions to which an answer was given by either checking a blank or circling a number. The first two questions dealt with job satisfaction, the next three questions dealt with their involvement in an exercise program, and the final two questions dealt with their age group and sex.

After two weeks, 74 of the 106 surveys were returned. The results were analyzed by looking at the correlation between participation in a fitness program and job satisfaction. In addition, the degree of job satisfaction, the type of exercise, the length of participation, age group, and sex were examined as to their relevant impact on the results. The different results and relationships were expressed as a percentage of the 74 respondents.

FINDINGS

The 74 completed surveys represented a 70 % participation rate. Of those completed, 58 (78%) expressed satisfaction with their job. 15 (21%) indicated they were not satisfied with their job. Of those in the satisfied category, 32 (54%) indicated they did not participate in a regular exercise program. 26 (45%) stated they did participate in a regular exercise program. Of those in the not satisfied category, 8 (53%) indicated they did not participate in a regular exercise program. 6 (40%) indicated they did participate in a regular exercise program. 1 survey was returned indicating no satisfied but no

indication on whether they work out. A second survey did not indicate whether they were satisfied but said they worked out.

One interesting observation is that of the 106 sworn officers, 13 are female. 10 surveys were returned from female officers. This represents a 77% survey participation rate among female officers as compared to a 67% survey participation rate among male officers. Among the returned surveys from female officers, 50% expressed satisfaction with their job as opposed to 40% expressing dissatisfaction. Of those satisfied, only 1 or 20 % participate in an exercise program as opposed to 80 % that don't participate. Of those dissatisfied with their job, 50 % work out and 50 % do not.

Among the 64 male participants of the survey, 83% expressed satisfaction with their job as opposed to 16 % expressing dissatisfaction. Of those satisfied 47% work out and 53% do not work out. Of those dissatisfied with their job, 40 % work out and 60 % do not work out.

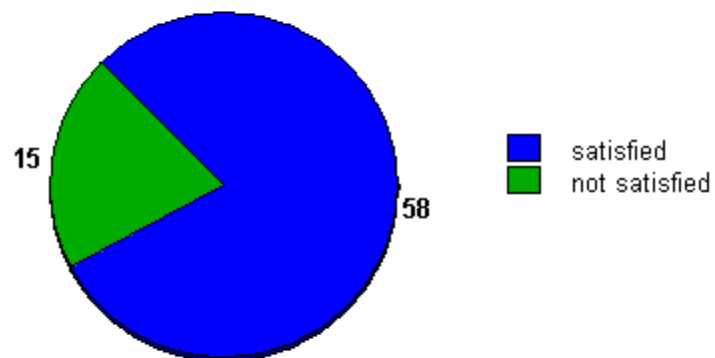
Of those that participate in exercising programs, running was the most popular with 28. Weightlifting had 24, aerobics had 8, team sports had 4, martial arts 2, other 2, and swimming 1. Many of the participants checked off more than one exercise program indicating variety in their exercise activities.

Analyzing the age groups of those that work out and those that do not work out did not reveal any significant differences within the age groups. Additional analysis of the surveys was not done due to the small statistical numbers involved. Following are several graphs that illustrate the results of the survey.

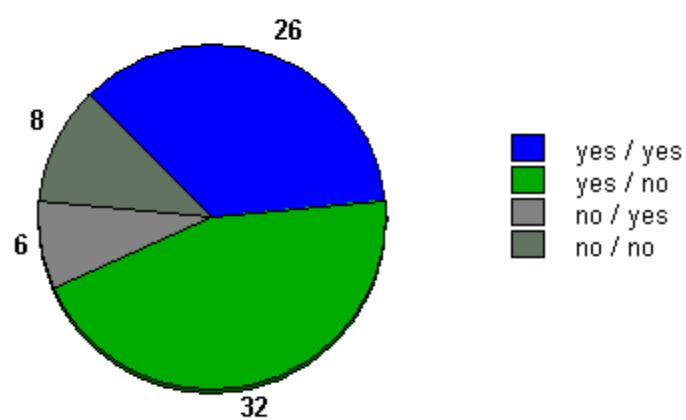
Survey Participation



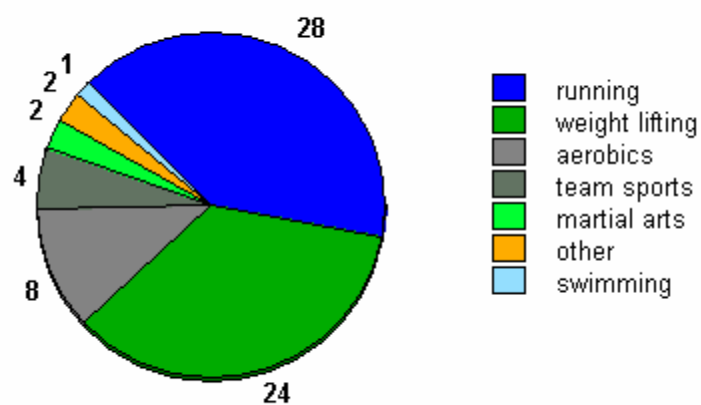
job satisfaction among survey participants

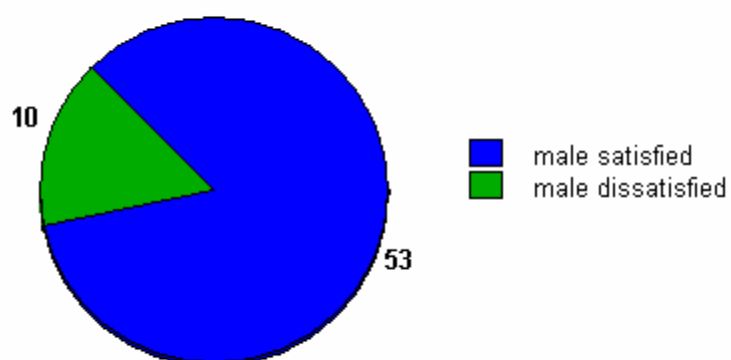
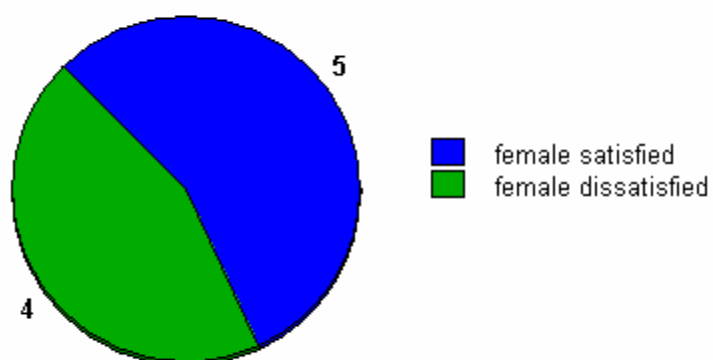


job satisfaction and exercise



type of exercise



comparitive satisfaction**comparitive satisfaction**

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

Physical fitness has become an important lifestyle change for many Americans. However, the majority have not taken advantage of the many benefits, real and perceived, that accompany this change. Law enforcement officers are no different. Many do participate in regular exercise but many do not. The purpose of this study was to look at the impact that participation in a physical fitness program has on perceived job satisfaction for law enforcement officers. For this study, the existing body of knowledge was reviewed for applicable information on this topic and the results were discussed. Secondly, a survey was developed and presented to the 106 law enforcement officers employed by the city of Sugar Land, Texas. This survey was designed to identify how many officers participate in a regular fitness program, how many officers are satisfied with their job, and the relationship between the two.

Is there a positive correlation between physical fitness and perceived job satisfaction for law enforcement officers? The existing body of knowledge appears to indicate mixed results. There does appear to be some correlation between physical fitness and perceived job satisfaction but not to the extent that clear, predictable results can be forecasted. The existing literature clearly outlines definite benefits from physical fitness and these secondary relationships may explain the mixed results. The survey also showed mixed results indicating that a close majority of those satisfied with their jobs did not participate in an exercise program. Whereas the majority of those not satisfied with their jobs did not participate in an exercise program.

This study is relevant to law enforcement both on a personal level and from a management perspective. Although the results of this survey do not show an affirmative

link between job satisfaction and physical fitness, the difference is small enough to justify further, and more in depth study. Coupled with the existing research examined for this paper, the potential benefits of physical fitness also illustrate the need for additional study. In closing, law enforcement managers can use this information when evaluating the costs and benefits of developing a departmental fitness program. Individual officers can use this information when reflecting on whether to begin or continue their exercise program.

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